

IndyCar Media Conference

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Josef Newgarden

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Joined now by Verizon IndyCar Series points leader, Josef Newgarden, driving the No. 2 DeVilbiss Chevrolet for Team Penske this weekend, by his bright orange fire suit.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Correct.

THE MODERATOR: Josef finished second last year at Watkins Glen International. After practice this morning, how are you feeling heading into the weekend?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Good. I think it's a cool weekend already. It seems a lot cooler than last year from a temperature standpoint. So that's been a little bit different, and the track differences from last year, how it's degraded over another winter, choosing downforce levels, seems like it's going to be a little different than last year, too. We're trying to work through it.

Felt like we had good speed to start. I think there's more than what the time sheet showed because of tire usage. I think some of the guys in the top 10 used a couple sets. We should be closer than what we showed on the Team Penske group.

But I feel good about it so far. Thought we had a good first run. Excited to get going in the second session.

THE MODERATOR: With a 31-point lead over Scott Dixon heading into this weekend, what are your thoughts championship-wise? Do you feel calm? Pressured? What are you thinking?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Thinking anything can happen. It's not a very big lead, in my opinion. 31 points is not much when you look at the current format. Sonoma, with double points, can make it swing any way really. There's a lot of people in the fight. One mistake, one misfortune with reliability, it's pretty much wide open, in my opinion.

It's the same thing here. The lead can slip away pretty easily. Scott is very capable of taking the lead out of this race. Something happens with our car. So I don't think we're in a dominant position. I think we're in a good position. I think you'd want 31 points in the lead whenever you can take it. It's certainly far from over, in my opinion. There's a long way to go.

THE MODERATOR: (Indiscernible) Verizon IndyCar

Series, so it's not like you're lacking experience. When you're looking at a driver like Scott Dixon that is chasing you, as well as your other teammates chasing you, what are your thoughts in knowing that you've reached a point in your career where you're battling for a series championship with people of that caliber?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think it's great for the No. 2 car. Obviously whenever you put a new group together, it's not completely new, there's a lot of guys that were there last year and years before with Montoya. It's not a completely new group. But certainly it's a new dynamic whenever you bring a new guy in.

We've all got to sort of gel together, figure out how we want to operate, how we work best together. You don't necessarily know how that's going to go. I didn't know how this year was going to pan out. I would hope we could have won a lot of races and been successful. I knew there was also going to be some gelling time we would need. We would need experience at racetracks together, that you just can't simulate. You can't do that in the off-season. You have to go through a season together.

I've just been really happy for that whole crew. Obviously Team Penske, it's nothing new to them. They're used to being in the fight. They expect to be in the fight. From that standpoint, it's kind of status quo.

But for me, it's fun to be closer in the fight. We've been in the fight the last few years for the championship, but it's been from a further distance. This time it's fun to be in a more prominent position, more in a striking position than we've been in the past.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Josef.

Q. Talk to us a little bit more about the track, its differences from last year to this year. Times were quicker first session last year, first session this year. What would that gain be made?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I got to think it's condition based with the temperature. So cool this morning that everything's working well. We're making a lot of downforce. The engines are working well. So I think some of it's in that.

I think for me the degradation is more related to the track. I notice more than last year, at least from just the 2 car side. I thought there was a bigger difference

in the way the tires took a step over the runs.

I don't know if that's going to continue or if it's going to get better as rubber gets laid down. Maybe I'm wrong and it will be similar to last year. I think the track has definitely changed from a balance standpoint and a degradation standpoint. I think the weather is just what made it so fast this morning. It's going to be interesting to see how quick we are in session two, if it will still be at quick or if we'll take a slight step backwards.

Q. It seems like a fairly smooth racetrack. I can't remember last year if it was more popular to run the red tires over the primary Firestone tires. It seems sometimes there's not that much difference, like you don't gain that much speed by being on the reds. I know Firestone has changed their tire. You probably haven't even run it yet, have you?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I haven't, no.

Q. Maybe this afternoon you'll check out those red tires. But as far as the weekend, I haven't seen what the weather is going to be. If it's a lot of hotter, how will that change things for the race?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Not sure yet. I mean, we'll have to get through the weekend and see how it's progressing. I think it's still a tossup between the red and black compound. Last year the black tires were much better from a degradation standpoint, from a performance standpoint. Guys chose to use those in the Fast Six. They were quicker than new reds. So I think it will still be very close this year.

Even Firestone has made a change. They had a tire test year. Will and Simon were a part of that. I've obviously gotten to see some of the information, along with everyone else. Firestone obviously provides everyone with the information from the tire tests.

It seems like they'll be close again. I don't know what will be quicker. I'll have a better idea once we run the second session, like everyone will. Everyone will run the red tires. But I don't think it's set in stone that the reds are going to be better either from a performance, overall lap time or degradation standpoint. I think it could still be quite close between them.

Q. Back to Gateway last weekend. You and your teammate had a little bumping going on. How is that relationship? Have you talked it over? Still animosity there?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I don't think there's any animosity, no. I see Simon quite often actually. We all live very close to the race shop, both Simon, Will and myself. I see them actually all the time, after race weekends, before race weekends. We've already seen each other, already spoken afterwards.

I know it seems like a show sometimes, but we actually do work really well together in this team. That comes from the top down, from the leadership. So we're

good, yeah, absolutely. I think we're excited to work together here this weekend.

He's a real professional racecar driver. So he's easy to work with, easy to get along with. I don't think there's any problems with us as far as going forward. We're going to work together like we always have.

Q. Part of the reason I think why (indiscernible) is because it's hard to pass at Gateway, a one-groove track. NASCAR has been experimenting with treating the track surface to open up the upper lane, give it more traction. Do you think IndyCar should try that so that you might have two grooves at a track like Gateway or other places that you go? Is that worth trying, do you think?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I don't want to say never. I wouldn't want to close my mind to it just because I have no experience with that type of thing. But it's probably not what I would prefer to do. I think some of that will hopefully evolve and develop and become better as we get the new kit. As we work closer with Firestone, with the IndyCar Series, I think that's going to get better as far as the race-ability of the track. Exactly what you talked about, it became difficult at Gateway because it was so one-laned, similar to Phoenix, there was only so much you could do to get by someone. I'm hoping that absolutely, I think everyone is hoping we can do more with the cars to make the drivability better in multiple lanes.

Like I said, I'm not a fan of the track treatment yet, but I would never be closed-minded to it because I have no experience with it. It could be a good solution. I think we should try and fix the problem with the racecars first, or try and improve the product with the racecars first, which is what we're going to have a shot at doing next year.

Q. One of the reasons that Will said he drove the last few laps of Pocono the way he did is because you are a driver who he knows will go for any gap. Simon found that out the hard way, as well. Is that going to change at all now that, rather than trying to fight a rear-guard action, you're trying to protect a fairly healthy championship lead?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, it's a good question. I don't know. I guess I shouldn't say I don't know. I have an idea of how I want to approach it. To me, I think the safest thing is to keep doing what we've been doing. The way I look at, it's not a very safe lead, it's really not. Even if you say, Well, okay, Scott's leading the race, we're second or third, we should just stay pat here and get some points. If we finish third, I think that closes it up enough to where Scott can be in striking distance at Sonoma, where if he wins the race, he wins the championship.

I think it's that tight of a championship battle where you have to be trying to increase the lead with regards to the points or just trying to go forward still. That's all

you can do is try to go forward, not overpush your equipment, trying to get the most that you can.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Thanks, everyone.

The way I view Pocono and Gateway, Pocono there was a time to be less aggressive, and Gateway there was a time to be more aggressive. I'll continue to do that going forward. You just got to analyze each situation individually and get the most out of yourself for each weekend in the car.

The points should shake out as they do. So I don't think I'm going to go into a safeguarding position at this point. I think you still have to keep pushing forward.

Q. You said earlier the temperatures were really cooler compared to Gateway, other races. Is this not the advantage, it's not so stressful for the equipment, engine, tires? Also for you from the condition point of view?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It's always stressful. I was worn out after 15 laps this morning. It's so physical here. I mean, it's just high commitment and relentlessly high commitment around this track. The cooler temperatures don't really make that better or different.

Same thing on the equipment. They're still pushed very hard regardless of the temp. I don't think it's going to be much different as far as a usage standpoint and how hard you're pushing the equipment just with the temperature.

Q. Do you have any concerns about your teammates taking points off of you? Obviously beside yourself, Simon and Helio are still within relative striking distance, as well. Do you think it's going to come to a point where they might need to help you out if it comes to that?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think only if it was a clear-cut situation where you should help your teammate, would that come into play. The best thing about Team Penske is they let us all race each other. It's kind of a dream situation. I think it's awesome that Team Penske's always done that. They've let their drivers race.

Until there's a clear situation where there's nothing to gain for someone else, maybe all to gain for the team, then I think that might flip. But right now there's no situation for that. I think everyone is still going to push as hard as they can and try and get the most points. Still going to take care of each other, as always, but I don't think there's any teammate help at the moment, which there never really has been unless there's a case needed.

At the moment, no, not yet.

THE MODERATOR: Josef, thanks very much for your time. Good luck this weekend.